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**County of Los Angeles**  
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March 1, 2006

To: Mayor Michael D. Antonovich  
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Supervisor Gloria Molina  
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke  
Supervisor Don Knabe

From: David Sanders, Ph.D.  
Director

**DECEMBER 6, 2005 BOARD AGENDA ITEM # 16 RE: MISSING CHILDREN  
MONTHLY UPDATE**

On December 6, 2005, your Board directed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to reconvene the "Missing Children Task Force" in order to continue in the identification and refinement of practices for the prevention and recovery of runaways; and to report back on a monthly basis with status updates on the following:

- I. Existing County-wide and community-specific services and programs, including the support that the DCFS Emergency Response Command Post can provide;
- II. Improved maintenance of the DCFS Missing Children Website;
- III. Enhancement of the DCFS Child Protection Hotline to provide specialized support for runaways;
- IV. Consideration of using the Permanency Partners Program (P-3), and;
- V. Addressing the issues that have been raised by youth who have been or are in care of the Department through corrections and modifications to the Department's policy.

**UPDATES**

- In order to be kept immediately abreast of on-going changes and to further refine department services for our Runaway youth population, and to ensure reconciliation of the numbers of runaways, I have named my Executive Assistant, Anita Shannon, as lead manager of this effort.



- P-3 workers are now routinely assigned to all runaways in the department. The collaborative effort has resulted in a successful partnership throughout the regional offices. A critical tool used by P-3 workers allows them to 'mine' significant family, friends, and other significant persons who are potential caregivers for the youth. Additional information on this significant and successful effort of the P-3 collaborative is highlighted throughout the remainder of the report.
- An internal workgroup comprised of social workers, regional and support managers met to delineate an appropriate definition for DCFS runaway youth. The exercise was done to adequately represent the target population that the Department serves and to denote the Department's legally recognized population of children and youth. The following is the definition that has been established by the Department via County Counsel:

**Runaway: Any child 17 years or younger in a Los Angeles County of Children and Family Services court-ordered foster care placement or court-ordered family maintenance placement *who willingly leaves placement without permission and is not taken by another individual.***

(Please note that youth 18 years and older will not be included in runaway count. However, we will continue to provide a documented count of that population of youth on the ARKS system and in our Board reports.)

## **CURRENT STATUS**

The following is a report of activities that have occurred toward addressing the above-named topics to date:

### **I. Existing County-wide and community-specific services and programs, including the support that the DCFS Emergency Response Command Post can provide:**

The Department held its initial reconvened Task Force meeting on February 15, 2006. It was a highly productive meeting, bringing together 58 former participants and new partners. Those represented included Department personnel, the Commission, community partners, including foster parents, child advocates and community based organizations and educators, city and county law enforcement, County Probation and Mental Health. The meeting covered a brief history of the concerns and issues as they pertain to DCFS runaways and emphasized reestablishing previous partnerships and creating new ones. Participants also related past and current efforts and strategies used to accommodate the runaway population. There was also an in-depth discussion on what is working (Permanency) and how to replicate the successes. Community and county partners pledged support to the Department's runaway reform efforts by



committing to serve on one of two sub-committees labeled Law Enforcement and Youth Concerns. Successive Task Force meetings have also been scheduled. The dates are March 30 and April 27, 2006.

The Law Enforcement sub-committee will focus on efforts which will assist the courts with distinguishing between runaway youth and young adults. They will also work on producing recommendations, which support the Department's efforts of assisting chronic runaways by way of referrals to community resources as opposed to punitive measures, such as issuing warrants. Initial recommendations will be brought to the follow-up Task Force meeting on March 30, 2006.

The Emergency Response Command Post personnel have also been involved in initial planning meetings to discuss ways to interface with local law enforcement. Presently through participation on the Law Enforcement sub-committee, they are looking at ways to acknowledge Runaway youth in a manner that involves partnering with community resource and referral agencies.

## **II. Improved maintenance of the DCFS Missing Children Website:**

The Department has continued its work to implement protocol for timely submissions and monthly reconciliation of the numbers of children/youth defined as runaways. Presently, we have a total of 403 children/youth in a runaway status:

Ages 0-9 years = 0; Ages 10-13 years = 18; Ages 14-17 years = 385 – Total 403

As denoted in the attachment, 96% of the population is between the ages of 14-17\*. 71% of our runaway population is female\*. Additionally, 58% of our runaways are of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity and the majority of runaways, 33%, are in court-ordered foster homes. Finally, the majority of runaways, 20%, come from our SPA 6 - an area where we have already begun implementing multiple strategies, including extensive community partnering. (\*The above-mentioned statistics correspond to National statistics according to The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Additional information on DCFS runaway statistics is available per the attachment.)

The Department has also engaged in initial planning meetings with pertinent Department staff, including court services, social work, and management staff to implement protocol for reporting runaways daily. Past efforts did not include daily reconciliation of runaway episodes and as such, the ARKS website did not consistently reflect the accurate number of runaways. It is critical to forward runaway episodes to the courts daily, as well as to inform the courts of children/youth who have been located. We now have a point person in each regional office that is responsible for entering and extracting information by way of the ARKS system. Further, so that we have consistent and accurate data entry, we will be conducting on-going ARKS data



entry training for regional staff with the assistance of our court services, BIS and Training Divisions.

The Department has inventoried and ordered additional cameras for all regional offices. The supplemental inventory will assist us in our endeavor to ensure mass training on Kidpix – a system by which child/youth pictures are taken and immediately downloaded onto the ARKS website. This training will allow for identifying information to be posted in an expedient manner.

The Department has also initiated a redesign of the ARKS website. Through a collaborative effort with the County's Internal Services Department (ISD), DCFS will endeavor to make the site more user-friendly. Changes will include citing the runaway definition; separating out 18+ year olds from the DCFS defined runaway population; and, noting abducted youth on a separate web page with more defined links to the local law enforcement and national resources. In addition, we will be able to access more qualitative and quantitative data for use with trend analysis.

### **III. Enhancement of the DCFS Child Protection Hotline to provide specialized support for runaways:**

The Department has begun initial training with key staff, which outlines interfacing with calls dealing with Runaways. Staff is being trained to ask specific questions regarding the population and Regional management is a member of both the reconvened Task Force and Law Enforcement sub-committee. Connections have also been made with local law enforcement through the involvement of the Department's MART team. The preliminary plan is to relay recommendations that will come out of the work done by the Task Force sub-committees and partner to create strategies to implement policies and protocol which will assist the Runaway population in a manner which is conducive to the needs of the population.

### **IV. Consideration of using the Permanency Partners Program (P-3):**

Initial collaborative efforts with regional offices and P-3 staff have already resulted in successful outcomes. Throughout the Department, regional line staff and P-3 workers are effectively partnering and the results are promising. In the past three weeks, P-3 worker efforts to locate or verify the location of 18 youth were successful (including two who were residing in Mexico).

P-3 staff throughout the Department continue to work on closing runaway episodes. They are assisting the CSWs with both location and placement efforts. Through the use of tools exclusively designed to access a host of family, and other significant adults, P-3 workers are successfully assisting permanency efforts.



The February Task Force Meeting also featured a presentation of the P-3 efforts with the runaway youth population. To date, three meetings have been convened, which have served to further the incorporation of P-3 strategies with the current case work of the departmental staff designated specifically for the runaway population – Street Outreach Services (SOS) and Runaway Adolescent Program (RAP). In those meetings, plans have been laid to facilitate RAP's involvement in training regional staff on the characteristics and detailed strategies used to service the population. Moreover, the RAP staff have started to compile curriculum used in their unique work to share with the Department's training staff. The intent being to instigate highlighting strategies utilized which are unique to runaway youth.

In addition, through your support of our on-going permanency efforts, we will shortly have the ability to bring on a significant complement of additional P-3 workers. The resource will be distributed across the Department and will appreciably enhance our ability to implement strategies to increase permanency goals and reduce the runaway population.

**VI. Addressing the issues that have been raised by youth who have been or are in care of the Department through corrections and modifications to the Department's policy:**

Upon reconvening the Runaway Task Force the Department was successful in its engagement of youth. Youth attendees and representatives came from the community as well as former foster youth, the current Emancipation Ombudsman and a community worker (former foster youth presently working for the Department). Their input was instrumental in shaping the reconvened Task Force agenda and agenda items for the subsequently formed Law Enforcement and Youth Concerns sub-committees.

The Youth Concerns sub-committee was able to identify 'triggers' for runaway behavior. The issues cited mirrored the 'top 10 issues' listed by the National Runaway Switchboard organization. They included concerns involving family dynamics (including domestic violence), school, mental health, sexuality, youth services, transportation, peers, and alcohol/drug abuse.

The Youth Concerns sub-committee established their focus by committing to identifying resources and strategies that would assist in allaying the 'triggers' for runaways. There was a great deal of discussion around preventative actions that should be implemented and/or reinforced by the Department. In addition, discussion centered around the need to continue on the path of permanency options and the availability of mentors – particularly for emancipating youth. As such, the Task Force agreed to identify Department initiatives and practices, which are working and should, perhaps, be



expanded upon. The group will bring initial recommendations to the next Task Force meeting to be held on March 30, 2006.

### **CONCLUSION**

It should be noted that the Runaway population we are reporting on encompass a myriad of issues and concerns which dictate the partnering of various resources simultaneously. To that end the Department's concerted permanency goals and resultant efforts will continue to allow us a varied, more holistic approach in addressing the root causes of Runaway behavior. As referenced above we have engaged multiple stakeholders, community advocates and county partners. As such, through Department efforts such as Point of Engagement (POE), and P-3; the solicitation of enhanced mental and medical health services; Juvenile Court and Law Enforcement involvement and Community resource partnering we may more inclusively address the factors needed for developing and maintaining well-being.

The Department of Children and Family Services thanks the Board for its attention to this urgent matter. The Department will continue to regularly review and direct resources to the goals of the Department – Safety, Permanency, and Reduced Reliance on Out-of-Home Care. Additionally, through the work of the reconvened Runaway Task Force, we will continue our efforts to effectively engage in an on-going collaboration with our County and Community partners and stakeholders for the appropriate provision of services which most significantly impact our runaway population. We will continue to report on current and consequential efforts involving our runaway youth in future Board reports.

If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact me, or your staff may contact Helen Berberian, Board Relations Manager at (213) 351-5530.

DS:AS:vm

Attachment

c: Chief Administrative Office  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors



**Abducted & Runaway Foster Childrens System (ARKS)**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON RUNAWAY CHILDREN SERVICED BY DCFS**  
**March 1, 2006**

Category	Totals / Subtotal	Percent
<b>Runaway DCFS Foster Children as reported in ARKS System</b>	403	
<b>Age</b>		
0-9 years old	0	0%
10-13 years old	18	4%
14-17 years old	385	96%
	403	
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	287	71%
Male	116	29%
	403	
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
American Indian	4	1%
Black	89	22%
Asian/Pacific Islander	7	2%
Hispanic/Latino	234	58%
White	69	17%
	403	
<b>Location of CSW</b>		
SPA 1	27	6%
SPA 2	43	10%
SPA 3	68	16%
SPA 4	41	9%
SPA 5	10	2%
SPA 6	79	20%
SPA 7	67	15%
SPA 8	53	12%
Adoption	2	0%
Specialized Programs	13	3%
	403	